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PSYCHOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODS

THE MYSTICAL AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL CONCEPT

CURRENT usage of the term "mysticism" is unprecise and inconsistent except at one point. Speculative or epistemological mysticism is well understood as a theory of immediacy, and specifically such immediacy as causes the finite search to cease because the other is no longer another. Professor Royce has given us a searching analysis of this epistemology,¹ but his plan did not require an investigation of the genesis of the experiences out of which speculative mysticism grows. Professor James names four marks of the mystical state—ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity²—but his attention, in turn, was upon the value rather than upon the genesis of the experience, and consequently the marks that he enumerates are borrowed without thorough criticism from the unscientific introspection of the mystic himself. Leuba, Murisier, Delacroix, and others have worked out either special aspects of mysticism or the psychology of a particular group of mystics, and in these studies there are many illuminating glimpses into the broad field of mysticism as a whole. Yet I know of no attempt to run a line around this broad field so as to determine its boundaries, nor have we, so to speak, a general physiography of it. The content and value of the mystical experience rather than its form and genesis have been the favorite topics of investigation.³ As a result, psychologists feel free to use the term mysticism in any sense that suits their incidental purposes,⁴ and even careful writers on religion define it with an arbitrariness that practically ignores both psychol-

¹ "The World and the Individual," Vol. I., Lectures II., IV., V.

² "Varieties of Religious Experience," pp. 380 ff.

³ I have attempted elsewhere to show that the merely formal conditions of ecstasy have much to do with its content. See "The Sources of the Mystical Revelation," *Hibbert Journal*, January, 1908, pp. 359-372.

⁴ For example, mysticism is defined as "the doctrine that events in the object-world, physical events as well as psychical, are not always subject to natural law, but are sometimes influenced in a manner that is fundamentally inexplicable from the standpoint of the causal conception of nature." Münsterberg, "Grundzüge der Psychologie," I., pp. 170 ff.

ogy and history.⁵ No wonder that popular speech plays fast and loose with the term, and that the religious world is in confusion as to the whole notion of religious experience.

How can we hope to make any approach toward precision in the use of this term, or secure a basis for a general evaluation of religious mysticism, unless we first make a general survey of the facts that seem to call for a common name? Such a survey ought to show whether or not any definite psychological fact or notion lies at the basis of the problem, and it will certainly do this if it reveals the genetic relationships of different types of mysticism.

As a rough attempt at such a survey, a tabular view of "the mystical" is herewith submitted. In the main it will explain itself. It takes its start from what is universally recognized as completely mystical, namely, religious ecstasy, together with the theory of it and the practise that seeks to realize it. In the next place, certain less extreme experiences, common to the great mystics on the road toward ecstasy, and to a multitude of those who never reach ecstasy at all, fall into place as mystical in the same sense as ecstasy itself. A convenient name for them is "inspirations." These, in turn, give rise to a belief and a practise. We next notice that experiences of the same psychological type take place outside of what is conventionally called religion. We might, indeed, extend the term inspiration beyond the religious usage. For spiritism gives us supposed inspiration by a deceased human being, telepathy by a living one, and clairvoyance and premonition by, perhaps, the nature of things. A common term for the phenomena in this field has, however, come into general use, namely, "psychical phenomena." For the practise of non-religious inspirations we have the general term "mediumship." Finally, looking to the historical genesis of these practises, we come upon the primitive root of the whole in automatic experiences interpreted as "possession," and cultivated by the "medicine man," the shaman, or the "witch doctor."

Complete enumeration is, of course, not intended, but only suggestion of the whole through typical classes. Nor is the table intended as an exhaustive division into mutually exclusive classes. The table does, however, group together phenomena, beliefs, and practises that are psychologically coherent, and it indicates the true psychical and historical genesis of the more developed practises. The psychical genesis of the whole is the duality, which is yet im-

⁵ Mysticism is the "attitude of mind which divines and moves toward the spiritual in the common things of life." F. Granger, "The Soul of a Christian," p. 41. "Mysticism is the love of God." W. R. Inge, "Studies of English Mystics," p. 37.

mediacy, that appears when automatic control occurs. Here is the psychical root of the whole of mysticism.⁷

A SURVEY OF THE MYSTICAL

THE EXPERIENCE	SUPPOSED SOURCE OR CONTENT	THE DELIBERATE PRACTISE
<i>The supreme mystical state (religious):</i> Either Ecstasy or Permanent Automatism Supposed form: Complete absorption or loss of personality. Supposed content: Either zero or infinity. But these are only limiting notions.	God Tendency toward pantheistic conception	<i>The attempt to realize God as the all:</i> Yoga The Christian "Via Negativa" Christian Science and New Thought The method: Narrowing of attention and auto-suggestion.
<i>Incomplete mystical states (religious):</i> Inspirations The experience of the seer; Sense of guidance or of illumination;⁸ Assurance or the witness of the spirit; Sense of divine communion; "Sense of presence"; "Anesthetic revelation"; "Cosmic consciousness." The form: Partial abeyance of self-control in mental functions. Occasionally, loss of muscular control also. The content: Somewhat specific ideas which commonly seem to be self-evidently or infallibly true.	God or Gods Generally conceived as transcendent	<i>Attempts to realize the God on special occasions or for special ends:</i> Oracles and Other Methods of Penetrating the Unknown Some Forms of Revivalism Holiness Movements and Allied Practises Divine Healing Transubstantiation The method: Surrender or quiescence of will, suggestion (largely social).
<i>Incomplete mystical states other than religious:</i> "Psychic Phenomena" This term includes supposed spirit-communication, telepathy, clairvoyance, premonition, etc.	A Spirit, A Living Man, or The Nature of Things	<i>Attempts to take advantage of supposed occult connections:</i> Mediumship in its Various Forms
<i>The primitive root of the whole:</i> Automatic Experiences Interpreted as Possession	Spirits	<i>Attempts to control spirits:</i> Certain Parts of Magic Shamanism

⁸ Here belong conversion experiences in which the subject feels that his questions are decided for him, or that his attitudes and decisions are wrought within him by God, or Christ, or the Holy Spirit.

⁷ It is not necessary for my purpose to maintain that a sense of immediacy to an other appears in connection with all automatisms, as, for instance, mul-

Leaving the details of the survey to explain themselves, I shall now offer some comments with a view to rendering still more precise the general character of the whole mystical movement.

1. The contrast between the mystical and the non-mystical upon which attention has chiefly centered concerns cognition. But certain phases of this contrast have been neglected. In the intellectual analysis that we call science, the mind is highly self-controlled (whatever self-control may ultimately be); it is thus that science seeks to reduce the less known to terms of the better known, the extraordinary to the ordinary, the complex and obscure to the simple and obvious. Mysticism, on the other hand, tends to reverse this process at every point. Having surrendered self-control, the mystical consciousness can not be analytical or critical. It deals with wholes rather than their elements, with conclusions rather than grounds; it reads the ordinary and simple in terms of the extraordinary, the complex, the undefined; in general it affirms, but does not deny. It is in strict accord with this, that when a mystic undertakes to philosophize, he is almost certain to pursue an *a priori* method and to seek alliance with one or other of the great speculative systems which find it easy to understand being in its totality, but hard to grasp its parts.

2. While the debate between the mystic and his opponent has almost always moved within the sphere of epistemology toward the concept of substance, another aspect of mysticism, and a not less debatable one, has been relatively unnoticed. Corresponding to the contrast between self-control and automatic control in cognition, there is a radical opposition in the sphere of values and purposes. On the one hand, we have values analyzed, approved, worked for in the full light of the individualized consciousness; on the other hand, we have values hit upon more or less fitfully in conditions of automatic control.

3. If we ask what valuation attitudes are, as a matter of fact, characteristic of automatic control, we come upon what appears to be a paradox. At first thought we should expect a reversion toward primitive instinctive evaluations. In demon-possession, in fact, we have such a reversion at times, and it is well known that the primal instinct of sex plays a prominent part in Christian mysticism. It is likewise true that the mystical state is less differentiated than the self-controlled state. In spite of all this, however, the practises

tiple personality. Yet such a thesis could make out a better case for itself than is commonly supposed. The investigation of multiple personality, post-hypnotic suggestion, hypnotic amnesia, etc., has naturally fixed attention first of all upon the contrast, the apparent duality. But it would be easy to show that, ordinarily, and perhaps always, this duality does not involve psychic discontinuity, but, on the contrary, involves a sense of immediacy to an other.

included in our survey make, all in all, for the maintenance of acquired moral standards. This is one chief source of their attractiveness, as it is also a ground of defense. How is it, then, that practises that surrender self-control are nevertheless so morally controlled? The reason is, that when self-conscious or rational control, with its tendency toward variation from type, ceases, its place is taken by social control. The habitual, the commonplace, the socially expected, is what ordinarily comes to the surface. The oracle, the yogi, the revivalist, all stand for the conservation of ethical standards. Thus, in spite of the fact that the *method* of mysticism is antithetical to moral self-guidance, its *product* is ethically conservative.

4. This fact has had momentous historical consequences. Whenever a rationalistic or scientific movement is seen to be undermining dogma, religion takes refuge in mysticism. This is not at all because mysticism has any peculiar competency in the interpretation of anything, but because it can be relied upon to conserve socially approved values, and because it promises an immediate experience of the values that are threatened. Here is the deepest root of supernaturalism. Its strength lies not in any articulate inspirations that it has to offer—for the most part it has at present no fresh inspirations of its own, but relies upon the inspirations of thousands of years ago—but in its promise of protection against threatened changes in moral values. For moral progress, therefore, we have to look elsewhere than to mysticism. Between mysticism and reflective morality, with its ever-repeated break with customary standards, there is a fundamental antithesis, namely, that between the highly individualized, self-controlled ethical will and automatic control which, as far as it goes, is preindividual and subindividual. When, therefore, religion becomes strongly ethical, mysticism becomes a hindrance, and at last, corresponding to the religious reaction from rationalism toward mysticism, we have a religious reaction from mysticism toward some sort of ethically progressive faith. Paul himself, mystic as he was, was able to point out "a still more excellent way," and the churches of to-day are moving out of mysticism toward this way of socially regenerating love.

5. Therefore, the identification of mysticism with religiousness in general goes astray. It is false at many points. For not only does ethically progressive religion break with the authority claimed for automatic inspirations; and not only is the development of individuality opposed to automatic control; but also, between religious mysticism, on the one hand, and spiritism, telepathy, and mediumship in general, there is no dividing line. The psychical process is the same, the ground of certainty is the same, the whole forms a

unit which constitutes the only distinctive basis for a definition of mysticism.

6. The mystical, then, is simply the automatic in general interpreted as ontological immediacy to any being whatever, divine, human, or subhuman. In strictness, the mystical is not a psychological term at all, since ontological interpretation is of its essence. Perhaps only a few psychologists are incautious at this point, but certainly the world of culture at the present day does sorely need to understand: *First*, That there is no distinctive "mystical experience," because the psychical factor in mysticism, the automatic, is entirely general, and not a kind of experience with distinctive content of its own. *Second*, That mysticism is not to be identified with religion or with any part of it. It is not true that all religion is mystical, or that all mysticism is religious.

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THE BASES FOR GENERALIZATIONS IN SCIENTIFIC METHODS

IN that all true induction involves generalizing on the basis of particulars, the question of the conditions under which various numbers of particulars are required for a generalization stands as a fundamental question in discussing inductive methods. There is no doubt that at times we are justified in making "sweeping statements" on small evidence, statements as to the quality of a certain brand of note-paper, for instance, on the evidence of a single small square; whereas at other times we ask for a more complete test, for a sample, perhaps, from the middle, the top, and the bottom of a barrel of apples, or for the examination of some hundreds of Italian immigrants, before we are ready to come to a conclusion. Several considerations seem to affect the investigator's judgment of the sufficient evidence for a generalization. The following classification attempts to group these in such wise as to suggest the questions one might well ask oneself before undertaking an investigation or criticizing a piece of work:

A. Only part of the field discussed is investigated.

I. The field shows uniformity

1. Over the field as a whole.

a. Absolute.

- (1) Complete isolation possible by direct means.
- (2) Complete isolation possible by indirect means.
- (3) Delicate technique calls for repetition of experiments.

b. General uniformity.